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TOP TEN WINTER FESTIVALS

1 MARDI GRAS, NEW ORLEANS, USA

Few people need to be reminded that Mardi Gras is one of the most serious parties on the planet. Swap winter blues for jazz and blues in New Orleans' French Quarter, where parades move through busy streets filled with bead and costume-wearing partiers. Join the good times on Bourbon Street and have fun keeping track of just how many beads you can obtain.

2 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL, UTAH, USA

Every year Sundance welcomes celebrities and A-listers from around the world, and as such is certain to be glamorous. Located in Park City, Utah, the festival celebrates independent film and its purveyors and runs from January 20-30. Can't get tickets to the competing films, but still want to experience the atmosphere? There's always skiing in Park City.

3 CARNIVAL, RIO DE JANEIRO

Some call the carnival in Rio "the greatest show on earth" and at times it isn't difficult to see why; the carnival even has its own week long pre-party. The event itself lasts four days (March 4-8) and ends the day before Ash Wednesday. Costume (and bathing suit) clad party-goers line the streets from the moment it starts, but it's the famous drag queen show and the culmination of the Samba Parade that packs the real punch. One of the biggest carnivals in the world.

4 WINTERLUDE, OTTAWA, CANADA

The first three weekends of February every year celebrates all things ice and snow in Ottawa, Canada. In 1979, the Canadian Capital Commission launched the first Winterlude to include ice and snow sculpture competition, ice skating, concerts, displays and activities. Explore Snowflake Kingdom, an enormous snow playground with 30 giant snow slides and ice carving exhibits, but the most thrilling of all is skating and sledding along the frozen Rideau Canal.

5 KIRUNA SNOW FESTIVAL, SWEDEN

Now over 25 years old, the Kiruna Snow Festival in northern Sweden is a celebration of winter and a chance to enjoy some unique entertainment, including reindeer racing and ice sculpting. The town of Kiruna is in the northernmost corner of Sweden, well north of the Arctic Circle, meaning a deep blanket of snow is guaranteed, and what better place to watch the breathtaking Northern Lights dancing in the sky?

6 WINTER FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS IN NIAGARA FALLS, CANADA

From November 6 – January 31, the CAA Winter Festival of Lights in Niagara Falls, Ontario showcases 125 animated light displays and three million tree and ground lights. See them at Niagara Parks Winter Wonderland, along with enchantment of Disney displays and the world's largest illuminated Canadian-American flag [photo: © WFOL.com].

7 VIKING FESTIVAL IN THE SHETLAND ISLANDS, UNITED KINGDOM

It's easier to forget the chill of winter when you're surrounded by fire. At the Shetland Viking Festival, participants dress up as Vikings and have loud and boisterous parades through the streets for what's locally known as Up Helly Aa, the world's largest fire festival. This is far from your average parade: the "Vikings" carry axes and torches and have like to burn things; all in good fun of course. The flames burn on the last Tuesday of January.

8 BUENOS AIRES TANGO FESTIVAL, ARGENTINA

The cultural highlight of Argentina's capital is undoubtedly the tango. For 10 full days at the end of February, the best dancers (milongueros) in the city perform and celebrate the art of the tango. Portenos (locals) and tourists alike are welcome to watch and participate as free tango lessons are given.

9 WINTER CARNIVAL, QUEBEC CITY, CANADA

Canada seems to have winter down pat. In January (the country's coldest month of the year), Quebec City puts on a big party before Lent. With its snowman costumes at the forefront, the town parties for two weeks by way of concerts, snow sculptures, dogsled rides, skating and parades.

10 BLUFF INTERNATIONAL BALLOON FESTIVAL, UTAH, USA

The Bluff International Balloon Festival in Utah gathers hot air balloons from all over the world to soar into the sky and teach children about flying. Activities that support education for local parks are also attractions for attendees.

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